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ABSTRACT

This study examines the systemic reform process that was initiated in Maryland in 1991. The Maryland School Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP) consists of learning outcomes, a framework for performance assessment, guidelines for school decision making, and suggestions for staff development. One year following the initiation of the MSPAP, a semistructured interview was conducted with the district-level administrators responsible for reading and language arts in the state. They were asked about their perception of the Assessment objectives and about the influence of the program on district goals and policies for instructional change. Learning outcomes were accurately perceived as requiring students to apply language to real-world problems and to construct meaning from a diversity of texts. The most frequently cited instructional innovations were the teaching of reading and language arts through subject matters of the curriculum and the use of trade books for reading instruction. The MSPAP was perceived by 24% of administrators as legitimating reforms already underway in their districts. Findings suggest that efforts toward reform should be linked to a sustained, change-oriented political process informed by actual data on the status of the reforms. (Contains 20 references and 1 table of data.) (Author/RS)

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Systemic Reform of Literacy Education: State and District-Level Policy Changes in Maryland

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READING RESEARCH REPORT NO. 27
Fall 1994

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The National Reading Research Center (NRRC) is funded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement of the U.S. Department of Education to conduct research on reading and reading instruction. The NRRC is operated by a consortium of the University of Georgia and the University of Maryland College Park in collaboration with researchers at several institutions nationwide.

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Abstract. *This study examines the systemic reform process that was initiated in Maryland in 1991. The Maryland School Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP) consists of: learning outcomes, a framework for performance assessment, guidelines for school decision making, and suggestions for staff development. One year following the initiation of the MSPAP, a semistructured interview was conducted with the district-level administrators responsible for reading and language arts in the state. They were asked about their perception of the Assessment objectives and about the influence of the program on district goals and policies for instructional change. Learning outcomes were accurately perceived as requiring students to apply language to real-world problems and to construct meaning from a diversity of texts. The most frequently cited instructional innovations were the teaching of reading and language arts through subject matters of the curriculum and the use of trade books for reading instruction. The MSPAP was perceived by 24% of administrators as legitimating reforms already underway in their districts. The implications of using the MSPAP approach nationally are discussed.*

Leadership in education at the national level is placing an increased emphasis on systemic reform. Although there are many perspectives on this issue (Fuhrman, 1993), we have used the framework described by Smith and O'Day (1991) as the point of departure for our examination of systemic school reform. Smith and O'Day emphasize three components in the process:

1. A unifying vision and goals that are informed by underlying values concerning intellectually stimulating and engaging education for all students and that can be communicated and measured in a convincing fashion

2. A coherent instructional guidance system that contains content goals, curricular materials, professional development opportunities for teachers, and assessments that monitor progress toward goals and support superior instruction

3. A restructured governance system in which schools are accorded autonomy and teachers participate in decision making to utilize resources allocated by districts

At the heart of several different systemic reform plans (Ravitch, 1993; Smith & O'Day, 1991; Spady, 1994) are statements of desirable student outcomes. In all cases, these concern how well students can show their knowledge, use their learning strategies, pursue their personal interests, participate in social organizations, and contribute productively to an expanding technological economy. Unlike the past in which basic skills were emphasized, goals for reading are now expressed in terms of multiple literacies that encompass how people communicate, think, and address problems. The knowledge upon which literacies draw is seen as personal, not objective; contingent, not fixed. Literate people are engaged in the constant creation, interpretation, and reinterpretation of knowledge, weaving it in and out of personal and societal narratives about the most fundamental human concerns (Brown, 1991a).

Such higher-order outcomes are accentuated in outcome-based education. Spady (1994) recommends that students should demonstrate *transformational literacy* (real-life functioning), *transitional literacy* (complex task performance), and *literacy in the traditional sense* (discrete, simple processes). The pivotal nature of outcomes in the systemic reform process is underscored by Ravitch (1993) who notes that "Standards are the starting point of education reform . . . . In the absence of national standards, we have evolved a haphazard, accidental, disconnected curriculum based on mass-market textbooks and standardized, multiple-choice tests. Education reform must begin with broad agreement on what children should learn" (p. 772).

Just as standards for mathematics learning were devised and widely disseminated by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, and science standards have recently been formulated by the American Association for the Advancement of Science for science education, the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association are developing standards in English and language arts. In addition to these projects of professional associations, standards in English, mathematics, and other subjects are being composed by the New Standards Project, which is privately funded and conducted through the Learning Research and Development Center and the National Center for Education and the Economy. These initiatives all define the aim of education as one of instilling those qualities in students that will foster the best interests of citizens and the cultural and economic growth of society.

A second phase in systemic reform is the development of an instructional guidance system (Smith & O'Day, 1991). In addition to curricular goals and materials, assessments are incorporated into instructional guidance; these are designed to measure how fully students are attaining outcomes and standards. Assessments are expected to depart from traditional standardized, norm-referenced measures because the assessments are criterion-referenced, and their content validity is at a premium. Also, the tasks must be inherently interesting, valuable, and productive for the student, as well as sensi-

tive to the educational and cultural circumstances of the schools. The outcomes of the assessments are not intended primarily to differentiate among students or to predict future performance but to define how well students are performing tasks that will be valuable to them in future schooling and in their cultural participation. Several investigations have documented the usefulness of portfolio (performance) assessments for those purposes (Schafer, Guthrie, Almasi, & Afflerbach, 1994; Valencia, Hiebert, & Afflerbach, 1993).

The third phase of the reform scenario involves school responsibility and governance. Assessments themselves do not improve learning. Policy makers and teachers concur that change in instruction will be the immediate source of improved student achievement. In the scenario depicted by Ravitch (1993), schools are assumed to be responsible institutions that are sensitive to the basis on which they are being judged. When assessments include an opportunity to provide visibility for school accomplishments and are viewed as credible by teachers and administrators, schools will revise and redesign their activities to promote the attainment of those goals. This emphasis on school responsibility was articulated in *America 2000* during the Bush administration and by President Clinton in his campaign publication, *Putting People First*. However, Clark and Astuto (1994) contend that a system emphasizing teacher and school accountability for meeting goals will undermine teachers' professionalism and generate antagonism among school personnel.

Enhancement of school responsibility should be based on the development of communities of teachers who are treated like professionals, not on accountability procedures, argue Clark and Astuto (1994). As decision makers, teachers should participate in communities of democratic discourse (Darling-Hammond, 1993). Principals should lead the professional community to design, critique, and improve structures and norms of professional practice and reflection. Central to productive school communities are organizational plans that create time for teacher planning and sharing as well as cultivate a culture of common beliefs about the learning and teaching of literacy (Donahoe, 1993). At the state level, a variety of administrations have emphasized site-based management procedures that allow and encourage schools to exercise freedom in rethinking instruction for the purpose of attaining commonly held goals of student learning. Although some authors claim that restructuring the governance system is the essence of systemic reform (Sashkin & Egermeier, 1993), this view may not place sufficient emphasis on instructional revision.

The organizations that promote and disseminate education standards do not expect that setting standards will accelerate student learning. Nor do they assume that assessments designed to measure standards will themselves promote student learning. Their pivotal assumption is that schools will generate new instructional designs, reorganize themselves to implement these designs, and follow through on implementation to ensure that student learning follows the profile written into the original statement of outcomes.

The systemic approach to educational reform that is embraced by many national lead-

ers is precarious because it rests on the untested hypothesis that a consensus regarding standards and the administration of suitable assessments will induce creative revisions of instruction that modify student learning. Although the hypothesis is plausible, and it has been assumed to be true in some circles (Newton & Tarrant, 1992), the hypothesis has not been tested or confirmed, as would seem advisable, considering its central role in this national movement. The aim of this study is to examine this hypothesis.

Assumptions Regarding the Public Interest

Some writers raise doubts about the systemic reform process (Brown, 1991b), and some writers contend that "we do not need new national standards or tests in schools" (Shannon, 1993, p. 90). To clarify our stand, we state several fundamental assumptions regarding education in a democratic society that undergird the national school reform proposals and the reform initiative in Maryland. Although most readers will find these precepts to be self-evident, others will not necessarily agree with all of them.

State education systems are constituted by public law for the public good. Citizens from many walks of life invest a portion of their income for the education of their own children—a personal benefit. The public further supports the teaching of all children for the benefit of the culture in which they live. The public interest is personal, cultural, and economic. Because the public assumes the responsibility for funding and sustaining schools, the same public claims a legitimate right to participate in defining the aims and shaping the means of education. Not only does the public have the right to participate in education, it is obliged to formulate desirable outcomes for its youth and to set sensible plans into motion for attaining these outcomes.

The population affirms, by virtue of its voting patterns, that it believes (1) in the importance of articulating a set of collective educational aims; (2) in the prudence of designing a set of efficient means to attain these aims; and (3) in the good sense of monitoring how well the aims are being accomplished. In a rational society, the future of children is considered to be well-served by discussions of how the most widely endorsed benefits of schooling can be provided to the largest proportion of youth over the longest period of time.

Questions Addressed in the Investigation

Our basic questions were designed to help determine how well the reform process unfolds in actual practice. With regard to the newly instituted statewide systemic reform program, we asked several questions: (1) Do district-level administrators express understanding and consensus about the state-level standards for student outcomes? (2) Do administrators perceive the framework for performance assessment that incorporates higher-order reading outcomes as the authors intended? (3) What kind of instructional and organizational revisions are being made in this reform context? (4) How are instructional revisions related to performance assessment?

METHOD

Rationale

This study examines the policies and practices followed during the educational reform process in Maryland. The rationale for choosing Maryland was that the blueprint for educational reform in this state is similar to the designs for reform that are being promoted nationally. Similar to the plans presented in *America 2000* and *Putting People First*, the Maryland School Performance Program contains the following five components:

1. Identification of learning outcomes (completed in May, 1990) which include satisfactory performance for all students in reading, mathematics, science, social studies, and writing, as well as functional literacy for all students

2. Development of performance standards, or statements of desirable student outcomes at the end of designated grade levels

3. Administration of performance assessments, which was initiated in 1990–91

4. Implementation of instructional and school improvements to assist students in meeting the standards

5. Publication of school, school district, and state-level results

Maryland State Education Goals

The State Board of Education adopted goals for public education on May 22, 1990. The State Department of Education developed ten goals that defined the state education outcomes at the broadest level. The goals are as follows:

1. Ninety-five percent of Maryland's students will start first grade ready to learn, as demonstrated by readiness assessments.

2. Maryland will rank in the top five states in the nation on national and international comparisons of student achievement and other measures of student success.

3. One-hundred percent of Maryland's students will be functionally literate in reading, writing, mathematics, and citizenship.

4. Ninety-five percent of Maryland's students will achieve satisfactory levels in mathematics, science, reading, social studies, and writing/language arts on state-developed measures.

5. Fifty percent of Maryland students will achieve excellence in mathematics, science, reading, social studies, and writing/language arts on state-developed measures.

6. The number of Maryland students pursuing postsecondary studies in mathematics, science, and technology will increase by 50 percent.

7. Ninety-five percent of Maryland students will achieve a high school diploma and will be prepared for postsecondary education, employment, or both.

8. Ninety percent of Maryland students who drop out of school will secure a high school diploma by age 25.

9. One-hundred percent of Maryland citizens will be literate.

10. Maryland schools will be free of drugs and alcohol and will provide a safe environment conducive to learning.

Standards in Reading

Three aspects of reading are contained in the statement of desired outcomes for students in reading: (1) literary experience, (2) comprehending informative text, and (3) reading to perform tasks. The objectives in the literary experience category consist of the following:

- Identify the most important event in a story.
- Summarize the story, play, or poem.
- Identify the lesson or moral in a fable.
- Identify major conflict in a selection.
- Identify the theme.
- Describe the setting by drawing a picture.
- Complete a graphic organizer.
- Present what main things happened.
- Infer traits, attitudes, and motives of characters.
- Interpret the expressions of characters.
- Locate descriptions of the settings.
- Read aloud with expression.
- List the events that lead to the climax of a story.
- Compare actions of characters to one's own actions in a similar situation.
- Discuss the conflict of a selection in light of one's own experiences.
- Identify feelings of characters that are like ones you have had.
- Analyze the author's perspective.
- Show how the author makes the story into a fantasy.

Some of the goals that pertain to comprehending informative text are as follows:

- Summarize the passage or tell what it is about.
- Restate information from the text.
- Infer the attitudes of people in a text.
- Describe what course of action one might take based on the text.
- Tell whether you agree or disagree with information from a selection.
- Identify the organizational structure of a selection.
- Judge the accuracy of an account.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of an author's argument.
- Describe the significance of illustrations and graphics to the total selection.
- Identify bias or propaganda in a text.

Goals in the category of reading to perform tasks include the following:

- Identify who would use a document such as a map.
- Identity how someone would use the document.
- Describe the central idea in a document.
- Paraphrase directions.
- Fill in a form with information.
- Draw inferences from information contained in two types of documents.
- Identify information within a document that one might need to complete a task.
- Compare a form in a document to something in one's experience.
- Identify points of confusion in a document.
- Compare two sets of directions or two displays of information.

These exemplify the goals and desired outcomes in the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program. The list is not comprehensive, but it illustrates the text types and the response expectations.

Construction and Administration of the 1991 Performance Assessment

The reading portion of the Maryland School Performance Assessment was constructed by reading specialists and teachers who represented all regions in the State of Maryland. Teams of teachers designed reading and writing tasks based on the reading standards to provide students opportunities to display their competencies to the fullest possible extent. The reading materials and the tasks consisted of stories, long expository passages, and a variety of documents such as illustrations, maps, and directions. The questions required students to respond at multiple levels of comprehension and thinking. Lower-level reproductive tasks were combined with expectations for the higher-order integration of ideas and critical response to text. Understanding concepts in science, social studies, and mathematics and presenting written expressions of those understandings were required.

The reading portion of the assessment was administered in conjunction with the mathematics and writing portions during a three-day period in all Maryland elementary schools. Teachers administered assessments to students within their own schools, but they did not administer them to students for whom they had teaching responsibilities. Student responses were coded according to guidelines developed by teams of teachers who were led by the State Supervisor of Reading. The psychometric properties, coding schemes, student responses, and administrative characteristics of the assessment are the subject of another study sponsored by the National Reading Research Center (Schafer et al., 1994). It is sufficient to point out here that the content validity of the tasks was regarded as high, and the reliability of coding was high enough to serve the purpose of school-building-level instructional program evaluation.

School-Based Instructional Decision Making

Central to the design of the Maryland School Performance Program are instruction and decision making at the school level. The Maryland School Program is an outcome-based

system that holds each school accountable for the achievement of its students. School-based instructional decision making is grounded in the belief that those responsible for implementing a program should be actively involved in planning it. Faculty and administrators in each school should be given as much autonomy as possible to exercise judgment in developing the curriculum. The State Department of Education stated that "instructional decision making refers to the process of involving school staffs in making decisions related to the delivery of instruction designed to achieve desired student learning outcomes" (MSPAP, p. 2).

It was expected that school-based improvement would be determined by the analysis and understanding of student achievement data. Using the data, schools were expected to rethink and possibly redesign their teaching strategies, grouping of students, assessment of student learning, instructional media, use of space and equipment, and parental and community involvement. Schools were, furthermore, expected to reconsider their scheduling of instruction, allocating of discretionary monies, differentiating curricula, using professional and paraprofessional staff, and expanding their external learning opportunities through field trips and projects in the community. Although this decision-making framework identifies some possible reforms of instruction at a generic level, the reforms are not specific to the reading program. Our purpose was to see how policies and practices for teaching reading were influenced by the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program.

Purposes of the Survey

This survey consisted of an interview with the administrators who were responsible for reading programs in each school district (county) in Maryland. The purpose was to describe these administrators' views of the Maryland Performance Assessment and the instructional policies and practices in reading that have been developed in response to the performance assessment program.

Participants

Twenty-one representatives from the 24 school districts in Maryland participated in the investigation (87.5%). Nineteen were females and two were males. Twenty of the individuals worked in their respective Board of Education offices and held positions such as Supervisor of Reading (5), Supervisor of Elementary Education (5), Supervisor of Instruction (3), Supervisor of Language Arts (3), Director of Curriculum (2), Reading Specialist, Principal and Coordinator of Chapter 1 and Testing. Nine of these individuals had doctoral degrees. Because school districts are organized by county in Maryland, the terms "school district" and "county" are synonymous in this report.

Administration of the Survey

County superintendents of instruction were contacted and asked to submit the names of one or more representatives from the county who were knowledgeable about the ways in which reading instruction in elementary schools may have changed as a result of the Maryland

School Performance Assessment Program. This process yielded 59 possible interviewees. One representative from each school district was contacted with a request to be interviewed; 21 of the 24 individuals contacted participated. All others were invited to submit their responses to the interview questions in writing.

Representatives were sent letters stating the purpose of the research project, explaining their role in the project, and describing the questions that would be asked during the interview. Interviews were conducted by telephone; each representative was asked the entire set of questions. Responses were recorded as fully as possible by hand.

The interview consisted of 13 items that were drafted by a team of four researchers familiar with educational measurement, assessment, classroom procedures, and the MSPAP itself. The goals of the interview were to: (1) determine what types of changes were occurring at a county level in response to the MSPAP, and (2) identify one or two elementary schools within the district that were making exemplary changes in response to the MSPAP. The second goal was included as part of an NRRC study of the school-level innovations prompted by district-level policies (Almasi, Afflerbach, Guthrie, & Schafer, 1994) and the barriers to implementing those innovations (Afflerbach, Almasi, Guthrie, & Schafer, 1994).

Survey Questions

The questions used are presented next; questions 1–7 are pertinent to this study.

1. In your view, what are the most important objectives measured by the reading/language arts portions of the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP)?

2. At the time the MSPAP was first administered in 1991, how well-aligned were the reading/language arts portions of the MSPAP with the curricular goals of your county?

3. Have your county's curricular goals changed as a result of the MSPAP? Can you describe the changes?

4. Have there been any changes in the amount or type of reading and writing instruction used in your county as a result of the reading/language arts portions of the MSPAP?

5. Have there been any district-wide curricular adaptations in terms of goals and/or materials used to accommodate instructional changes as a result of the MSPAP?

6. Are students in your county better readers now as a result of these instructional changes? How do you know?

7. Are there any groups of students that have been targeted for special activities because of the MSPAP?

8. What other instructional or curricular decisions have resulted from the MSPAP?

9. Can you name one or two elementary schools in your county that you feel represent examples of schools that are making changes as a result of the MSPAP? (Ask if respondent thinks their county was responding in ways similar to the MSPAP prior to its implementation)

    - A school that had maximum change irrespective of what was happening before the MSPAP

    - A school that had maximum change that is consistent with the MSPAP

10. What innovations are being made in these schools?

11. Are there any special programs that characterize these schools (e.g., federal funding, magnet schools)? How would you describe the relationship between administration and faculty at these schools?

12. What demographic information characterizes these schools in terms of racial composition, attendance, socioeconomic status, and school population?

    - Racial composition:
    - Attendance:
    - Socioeconomic status:
    - School population:

13. What county procedures should be attended to should we wish to interview teachers and other professionals in these schools as part of this research effort?

Recording Responses to the Interviews

Responses to each question were written in abbreviated form by the interviewer, who is the second author of this report. The first author compared these abbreviated responses to the field notes taken by the interviewer on each question. The abbreviated responses were discussed, and any differences between the two authors were resolved. A frequency count was made to determine the number of participants in the survey who expressed each of the different abbreviated responses to each of the 13 questions in the interview. Individuals were permitted to give as many responses as they wished, so the totals often sum to more than 21. The results of the survey are presented in Table 1.

RESULTS

The findings from the survey are presented for each question in Table 1. The percentage of reading administrators in each county that responded to the questions is included.

DISCUSSION

Administrators of reading in the state of Maryland thought that the reading portion of the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program emphasized: (1) constructing meaning across a variety of texts, (2) applying language and critical thinking capabilities to real-world problems, and (3) writing extensively to express interpretations and critical responses to text. The administrators viewed these objectives of the Improvement Program and the Performance Assessment as substantially different

Table 1. Percentage of Reading Administrators in each County that Responded to the Questions

Question 1: In your view, what are the most important objectives measured by the reading/language arts portions of the MSPAP?

Total	%	Response
8	38.1	Constructing meaning across a variety of texts
8	38.1	Applying language and critical thinking to real-world problems
7	33.3	All are important
7	33.3	Writing in response to reading stances
5	23.8	Constructing meaning using different stances
5	23.8	Strategic reading
4	19.0	Creating motivated readers
4	19.0	Integration across the curriculum
2	9.5	Use of personal experiences
2	9.5	Reading comprehension
1	4.8	Reading as a literary experience
1	4.8	Collaboration among students

Question 2: At the time the MSPAP was first administered in 1991, how well-aligned were the reading/language arts portions of the MSPAP with the curricular goals of your county?

Total	%	Response
5	23.8	Highly
8	61.9	Moderately
3	14.3	Not at all

Question 3: Have your county's curricular goals changed as a result of the MSPAP?

Total	%	Response
5	23.8	Changed substantially
8	38.1	Changed slightly
8	38.1	No change

Reason for No Change

7	87.5	Had prior consistency
1	12.5	No change yet

Of those who reported change, how have county's goals changed?

7	38.9	MSPAP helped refine, served as impetus, or was vehicle for implementing ideas that were already underway
7	38.9	Integration across the curriculum
6	33.3	Use of trade books, literature
4	22.2	Developed new reading guides
3	16.7	Emphasize the process approach more now
3	16.7	Cooperative learning
3	16.7	Adopted the stances (reading to perform a task, to inform, for literary experience)
3	16.7	Developed new county-wide assessments
2	11.1	Flexible grouping
2	11.1	Vernacular has changed
2	11.1	Use of strategies
1	5.5	Provided teachers with more of an opportunity to make instructional decisions
1	5.5	Teachers are being in-serviced
1	5.5	Success for all students
1	5.5	Emphasize different types of writing

Table 1. (continued)

Question 4: Have there been any changes in the amount or type of reading and writing instruction used in your county as a result of the reading/language arts portions of the MSPAP?

Total	%	Response
13	61.9	Integrating reading, writing with content
8	38.1	Purchased/used more trade books
7	33.3	Increase in amount of writing/process writing
5	23.8	Provide in-service for teachers
4	19.0	Cooperative learning
4	19.0	Use a language arts block
4	19.0	More writing in response to reading
3	14.3	Increased use of expository text
3	14.3	Read for a variety of purposes
3	14.3	Write for different purposes
3	14.3	Flexible grouping
3	14.3	Thinking strategies/dimension of thinking
2	9.5	Increased amount of reading
1	4.8	Peer response
1	4.8	Strategy instruction
1	4.8	Emphasize positive attitudes

Question 5: Have there been any district-wide adaptations in terms of goals and/or materials used to accommodate instructional changes as a result of the MSPAP?

Total	%	Response
10	47.6	Literature-based instruction/thematic units/integration
6	28.6	Handbooks, manual, curriculum guides changed
5	23.8	Developed own assessment instrument
4	19.0	Dimensions of thinking
4	19.0	Strategic planning committees organized
3	14.3	Flexible grouping
2	9.5	Grading/reporting policies changed
2	9.5	Cooperative learning
2	9.5	Responding to writing prompts
2	9.5	None
1	4.8	Infusing staff development days into calendar
1	4.8	Resources too limited due to budget to do much
1	4.8	Notion of reading as a transaction
1	4.8	Implemented a new unit planning model for teachers
1	4.8	Collaboration with other counties
1	4.8	Supervisors work in coordination with one another
1	4.8	Developmental spelling

from the reading tasks that are prominent in standardized reading measures such as the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills that has been used previously in the state. Despite these trends, there was not a widespread agreement regarding these goals. Approximately one-third

Table 1. (continued)

Question 6a: Are students in your county better readers now as a result of these instructional changes?

Total	%	Response
6	28.6	Yes
5	23.8	Slightly better
8	38.1	Too early to determine
2	9.5	Same

Question 6b: How do you know? (N = 12) Includes all that responded "yes," slightly better," and one who responded "same"

Total	%	Response
2	16.7	Better writers
6	50.0	Enjoy reading more • Pick up more books • Check out more books from school library • Have incentive programs • Observe students reading more • Sustained silent reading • Book clubs • County library used more
4	33.3	Reading comprehension scores on CTBS improving
2	16.7	County tests, basal placements tests, Gates-MacGinitie

Question 7: Are there any groups of students that have been targeted for special activities because of the MSPAP?

Total	%	Response
16	76.2	No
8	50.0	We target all children
8	50.0	We target all groups but not due to MSPAP
7	87.5	At-risk; Chapter 1, reading recovery
0	0.0	Middle school
1	12.5	Special education
1	12.5	Highly able readers
5	23.8	Yes
3	60.0	At-risk; Chapter 1, reading recovery
2	40.0	Middle school
2	40.0	Special education
2	40.0	Highly able readers

of the administrators thought integrated reading competencies were a priority; another one-third said critical thinking was a major goal; and another one-third identified writing as the most important outcome in the framework. These administrators did not possess a common

vision for education advocated by most writers on systemic reform (Fuhrman, 1993; Smith & O'Day, 1991).

The administrators viewed the objectives of the Performance Assessment to be moderately well-aligned with the existing curricular goals of their counties. Approximately 62% of the administrators indicated that their goals were aligned moderately well with the assessment at the time of its first administration. Despite this degree of initial consistency, however, 62% indicated their counties' curricular goals had changed substantially or changed slightly to increase their consistency with the learning outcomes contained in the objectives of the assessment. The administrators who indicated that no change had occurred in the curricular goals stated in overwhelming numbers that their goals were consistent prior to administration of the Performance Assessment and there was little need for altering them.

Five types of district-level policy changes prevailed in these reports. The administrators emphasized increases in each of the following:

- Integration of reading into other content areas
- Use of trade books and literature as a basis for reading instruction
- Efforts to broaden the curriculum to include the literacy goals
- Cooperative learning as a more important feature
- Construction and use of new county-wide assessments

Because these changes brought the instructional goals and materials (books) into a closer alignment with the desired outcomes, the policy for instructional guidance showed a discernable coherence of the kind recommended by Smith and O'Day (1991).

One aspect of the systemic reform scenario that was not evident in the district policies for reading was change in the level or type of school governance and teacher decision-making (Erickson, 1990). Administrators seldom (only 19%) formed teacher-planning teams to address the new student learning goals. Few administrators (4%) reported that they were working with other districts; and few (5%) indicated that teachers were given more instructional decisions. The vibrant, school-wide teacher discourse advocated by Darling-Hammond (1993) and Clark and Astuto (1994) was not observed in these districts.

Asked whether the students are better readers as a result of changes taking place following the Performance Assessment Program, a plurality of administrators indicated that it was too early to talk. Those administrators who reported positive effects on student learning said that they thought students were more fully engaged with reading as a school and recreational activity. They reported that students appeared to check out more books from the school library, enjoy incentive programs, request silent reading in schools, participate in book clubs, and to use the county library more frequently than they did prior to the administration of the Performance Assessment. Some administrators noted that they thought the reading comprehension scores on the comprehensive test of basic skills standardized measure were improving. Administrators reported

that these curricular shifts were very demanding on the time, ingenuity, and management capabilities of the administrators and teachers.

The MSPAP was a catalyst for new thinking among many administrators. Because the Assessment was designed, composed, and administered by teachers, it was reasonably consistent with administrators' and teachers' beliefs. This consistency enabled the assessment to spur the implementation of constructive instructional options. The Assessment led to the introduction of more complex, reading, writing, and thinking activities and it spawned a richer context for the performance of those tasks than previous testing systems have permitted. The inclusion of real-world reading activities in the Assessment fostered the development of policies that encouraged instructional integrations of reading into varied contexts of learning, such as history, science, and literature. However, the extent of these changes was not remarkable, which is consistent with experience across the nation (Marzano, 1994). Although some of the districts adopted some of the state-wide goals, and some of the instructional changes were tied to some of the goals, a broad-reaching, coherent program based on a vision for student literacy learning, coupled with an instructional guidance system and supported by a revised governance structure (Smith & O'Day, 1991), was not evident at this early stage of the reform process.

Systemic reform programs should be judged in terms of whether students are accomplishing the desired outcomes (De La Luz Reyes & McCollum, 1992). The question is: Are students reading better than they were before the reform initiatives? At present, we do not have the student achievement data to address this question, either in Maryland or in other states that have initiated outcome-based reforms such as Connecticut or Kentucky. But even if we had the data, it would be premature to conclude that systemic reform has succeeded, as the proponents might prefer, or that it has failed as the critics have argued (Clark & Astuto, 1994), because the fundamental conditions of reform have not been implemented.

Many pronouncements of success and failure in school reform are premature. The Maryland experience teaches that consensus is not attained immediately, that the first version of performance assessment is not optimal (Schafer et al., 1994), that instructional ideas are often innovative (Almasi et al., 1994), but there are multiple barriers to fundamental change (Afflerbach et al., 1994). These findings suggest that efforts toward reform should be linked to a sustained, change-oriented political process (Clune, 1993), informed by actual data on the status of the reforms. Schools, districts, and states require data to inform the evolution of their outcomes, assessments, instructional practices, and governance structures. If districts are to become learning organizations and schools are to become learning communities, they need to conduct reality checks on their own reform programs.

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